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**Republican Hypocrisy on Spending**

**By Senator Kent Conrad**

Republicans talk a big game when it comes to fiscal discipline. They claim to champion spending restraint in the appropriations process, and seemingly every year make a big fuss over the need to stop wasteful spending. But this talk represents nothing more than a whole lot of bluster to deflect attention from the fiscal irresponsibility of their relentless pursuit of tax cuts.

The fact is, the tax cuts pushed through by President Bush and Republicans in Congress have been the largest single factor causing the nation's plunge back into deficits over the ten-year period, 2002-2011. The increases in discretionary spending over the last few years have been small in comparison and have resulted almost entirely – 94 percent – from additional defense and homeland security spending that has received broad, bipartisan support.

In their effort to divert the people's focus from this reality, each year, Republicans propose to hold the lid on spending. Following these very public displays of fiscal prudence, Republicans quietly add back funding through the use of gimmicks and supplemental appropriations.

Last year's budget drama was a perfect case in point. For months, Republicans criticized the Democratic Senate Budget Committee-passed 2003 budget resolution, which proposed \$768 billion in discretionary budget authority for the year. Sticking to their script, the Bush administration and the Republican leadership insisted that it was too much and that Congress had to adhere to the House-passed budget resolution level, which was \$9 billion lower. This led to a needless five-month disruption in funding for domestic agencies and programs, with lawmakers in both parties reluctant to accept the cuts that would be required with funding at that level.

In the end, of course, using gimmicks, such as shifting resources back into 2003, and by providing additional supplemental funds, Republicans will have added back all of the funding for 2003 that they previously said was unacceptable. The dirty little secret Republicans don't want you to know about is that, even excluding the additional funds provided for the war in Iraq, the Republican spending level for 2003 will actually exceed the amount proposed in the Democratic Senate Budget Committee-passed budget resolution by about \$2 billion.

Notably, Republican hypocrisy on spending was in high gear in the Senate during consideration of the 2003 omnibus appropriations bill. The Republican leadership came to the Senate floor armed with charts deriding Democratic amendments and accusing Democrats of trying to add almost half a trillion dollars to the budget. But this accusation was ludicrous on its face. Even if all of the Democratic amendments had been adopted – providing critical funding for homeland security, education, and other domestic priorities – they would have cost \$37

billion, not \$500 billion. These amendments were for one year of additional funding, not 10 years as Republicans claimed, and they were offered individually, not as a package.

Not surprisingly, Republicans failed to live up to their own rhetoric regarding fiscal responsibility. In their closed-door, Republican-only conference negotiations on the 2003 omnibus, the Republican leadership added \$63 billion in spending – most of which was mandatory spending. In other words, with apparently no embarrassment whatsoever, Republicans criticized Democrats for wanting to spend too much and then, on their own, proceeded to add \$63 billion more in spending in a conference with little public debate.

Sadly, year after year, Republicans seem intent on using the appropriations process to score political points and burnish their false image as a party of fiscal responsibility. This is no way to govern. Under Republican leadership we have turned record surpluses into record deficits. Rather than protecting Social Security and putting us in a strong position for our future, the Bush administration and Republican majority in Congress have driven us back into the deficit ditch, raiding virtually every penny of the Social Security surplus over the next decade. Instead of feigning concern about fiscal discipline by proposing spending levels that they have no intention of holding to, Republicans should stop recklessly promoting massive deficit-financed tax cuts that are the major source of our budget woes.

*Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) is the senior Democrat on the Senate Budget Committee.*